

laws grow the economy because they accelerate the movement into new technologies, into new fields and dealing with new challenges. That's what I believe; I've always believed that. And I think that we permit the degradation of our environment at our peril. I think it's an obligation we owe our children.

Well, 5 years later, the air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food supply is safer. We have more to do, but it's safer. We have fewer toxic waste dumps, and the economy is the best it's been in a generation. I think our idea that you can grow the economy and preserve the environment was the right idea. I think the assault they waged on the environment that we stopped them from raising was ill-advised and unnecessary. And I think now we have 5 years of evidence.

So when you go home tonight, I want you to think about those folks I talked to you about in Wichita. I want you to think about all of the millions of people whose lives have been changed for the better by the policies that we've implemented, and I want you to realize there's a direct connection between the fact that you were willing to stand up and put your voice on our side, put your contributions into our efforts, and give our side a chance to be heard. You made that all happen. That's what the public system we have in America is. That's what it means to be a citizen.

And as you look ahead, I really believe that our country has the 50 best years facing it that any society has ever known if we do the right things—if we do the right things. We've still got a lot of challenges out there—economic, educational, entitlement reform, environmental challenges—a lot of things. But we have to keep our eye on the ball. We should do those things which create opportunity and reinforce responsibility. We should do those things which bring us together as one community—celebrating our differences, but identifying those values that are even more important that bind us together.

We should do those things that reinforce our role as a beacon of freedom and hope and prosperity and security in the world. That's what we should do. That's what the Democratic Party stands for. And that's what you have stood for. I am very grateful and

I hope you will always be very proud, not only that you were here tonight but that you have contributed to changing the face and the future of this country.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 p.m. in the Ballroom at the ITT Sheraton Luxury Connection Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to C. Thomas Hendrickson, chair, Democratic Business Council; Steve Grossman, national chair, and Alan D. Solomont, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner

November 18, 1997

Thank you. Thank you very much for being here tonight. I won't take a lot of time because I want to just sit and visit. But I would like to just begin with a story.

Yesterday I was in Wichita, Kansas, coming back from California, and I visited the Cessna airplane manufacturing facility—not the plane facility but their training facility for people they're trying to move from welfare to work. And we went there for a number of reasons. One was to announce that we now have 2,500 businesses who have committed to be part of our partnership to hire people from welfare and put them into the workplace. These 2,500 businesses are small, medium, and large. Seventy-five percent of them are small businesses, but combined they have over 5 million employees.

The other reason I went there is because the way this Cessna project works is the way I'd like to see America work not only in this issue but a lot of others. They receive support for a number of the things they've done from the Labor Department and from the Housing and Urban Development Department, and of course they have the framework of the welfare reform bill.

But here's what they do: They go out and take people—many of them the hardest to place people on welfare—and they put them through a 3-month training program. And then if they go through that, they put them through a 3-month sort of pre-job program. And if they get through both, they get an

automatic guaranteed job at Cessna at high wages and good benefits.

And some of these people have very, very difficult home circumstances. They're not just—they're not taking the most well-educated people who just temporarily hit a bad patch and get on welfare. A lot of these folks are high school dropouts. Many of them are women who have been abused in a domestic setting. And they actually have a housing development across the street from the training center to give temporary housing to anybody who either doesn't have a car or has been kicked out of their house because of a violent situation.

And I'm telling you, it was the most exhilarating thing. I was introduced by two women who graduated from this program, and then I met their children. And when it was all over, I looked at the man who was with me and I said, "This is why I got into public life: to be a part of things like this, to change lives in this way, to do something that works."

And of course, having a good economy has helped. They have 1,000 more employees than they had 4 or 5 years ago. But the main thing is, it's fresh evidence that we can make the country work if we do something that makes sense and we do it together and it's consistent with our values.

So for all of you who have made any contribution to the fact that we have the lowest unemployment rate and the lowest crime rate in 24 years and the biggest drop in welfare in history, and we've grown the economy while making the air and water cleaner and the food supply safer and having fewer toxic waste dumps, that we've built more jobs but tried to help families with the family and medical leave law and tax cuts to raise their kids or adopt children or send their kids to college—I hope you'll take a lot of pride in that.

We've got a lot of challenges up the road, but at least no one in America could doubt today that we can make this country work and that when we make it work for everybody, you see the kind of profoundly humbling and awesome stories I saw in Wichita yesterday.

I'd also like to remind you that elections are contests of ideas and perceptions. And I think in a rational world, where everybody

had equal access to the voters, our party would be in better shape than it is today, because in '93 we had a big fight over the economic direction of the country, and I think the evidence says we were right and they were wrong. But they profited from it.

In '94 we had a big fight over our crime policy, and we stood up to the people who said I was going to take their guns away if we passed the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban. And I think the evidence is we were right and they were wrong.

I think the evidence is our environmental policy, our education policy, our family leave policy—all these things, I think, our party has been on the right side of history and on the right side of the basic values of America. And I think the more people like you help us to get our message out and make our points, the more you'll change America and the more, parenthetically, people will know who did what, when, and why.

So there is a direct connection between what I saw in Wichita yesterday and your presence here tonight. And we have to make a lot more of those stories in the future. And I'm very grateful to you for your role in doing that.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:44 p.m. in the Chesapeake Room at the City Club of Washington.

Statement on Signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998

November 18, 1997

I have signed into law H.R. 1119, the "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998." This Act authorizes fiscal year 1998 appropriations for military activities of the Department of Defense, military construction, and defense activities of the Department of Energy. Although I have reservations about some provisions in this Act, it supports a large number of my Administration's defense program and policy priorities. Moreover, the conferees' revision of the bill satisfactorily addresses several onerous provisions that were included in previous versions that my Administration opposed.